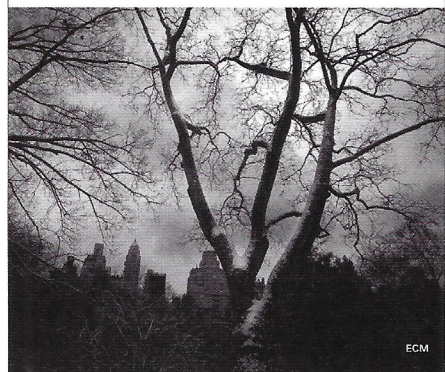


TOMASZ STAŃKO NEW YORK QUARTET DECEMBER AVENUE



Tomasz Stańko New York Quartet *December Avenue*

ECM 2532

★★★★★

The deep collaboration between members of Tomasz Stańko's New York Quartet makes the music on its second album both a pathway to pleasure and an opportunity for solace, but it's the tone and timbre of the leader's horn that's most fetching. The 74-year-old trumpeter continues to burnish his earthy sound, and its character morphs in intriguing ways on this jewel of a date.

Preservation Hall Jazz Band *So It Is*

COLUMBIA/LEGACY 889854179120

★★★★½

Bandleader Ben Jaffe may be the son of Preservation Hall founders Allan and Sandra Jaffe, but this is not your father's Preservation Hall Jazz Band.

In this rather short album, the PHJB attempts to leapfrog from the 19th century to the 21st, turning sharply from preservation of antiquity to renewal of itself. Tradition is rationed carefully now—a bit of slushy plunger trombone from Ronell Johnson, perhaps. But without the rich logic of the old New Orleans melodies, the band feels caged in its own cramped repertoire of relentless riffs. Energy replaces logic. Still, the strong Afro-Cuban accent and tight front line never starve the music of power or punch, and there is almost always a partnership between soloist and band.

The title track is essentially a softly voiced, 16-bar background line that opens up for a fluttering piano solo by Kyle Roussel. "Santiago" is a pumping, 12-bar rhythm riff, high on voltage but low on nuance, in which Stephen Lands lights things up with the sort of broad, bellowing strut that can rouse a crowd. For the

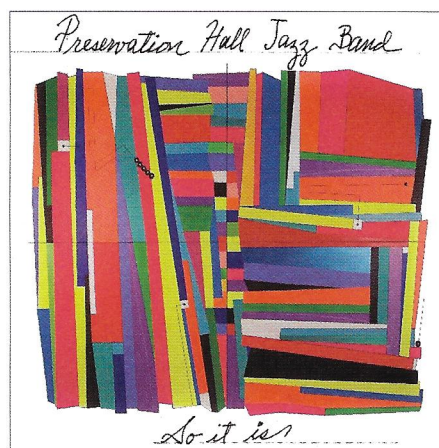
The Polish bandleader has embraced scads of U.S. players in the last few years. Pianist Craig Taborn, drummer Jim Black and others have gone through the ranks of his New York Quartet. But for recording, he's settled on a squad that's expert at both rumination and buoyancy. Pianist David Virelles and drummer Gerald Clayton helped him make 2015's *Wisława*; bassist Reuben Rogers replaces Thomas Morgan for this new date. Together they bask in the attractions of mood while leaving ample room for some nu-bop frolic. There's about a 70/30 split for those directions here, and the shifts between them are beveled enough to create a string of revealing transitions.

A bit of Lester Bowie cackle marks the animated passages. Stańko gets frisky on the title cut, and while the action is all quite measured, the refinement doesn't preclude anyone from searching for some friction points (Clever is key to this process). Perhaps more telling are the moments of reflection. "Cloud," "Blue Cloud" and "The Street Of Crocodiles" all find the foursome waxing instinctual while establishing a rich atmosphere. —Jim Macnie

December Avenue: Cloud; Conclusion; Blue Cloud; Bright Moon; Burning Hot; David And Reuben; Ballad For Bruno Schulz; Sound Space; December Avenue; The Street Of Crocodiles; Yankiel's Lid; Young Girl In Flower. (64:16)

Personnel: Tomasz Stańko, trumpet; David Virelles, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Gerald Clayton, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



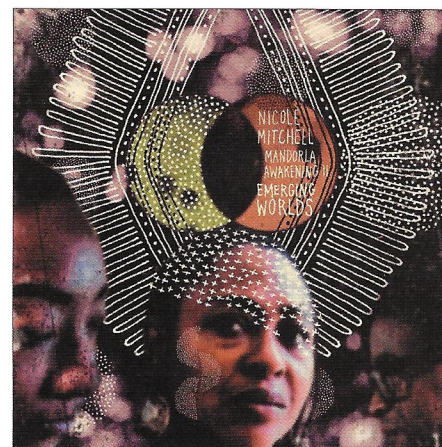
preservationists, the PHJB loses its innocence forever on "Innocence" when Roussel solos on electric piano. But tenor saxophone is percussive and pithy on "Convergence" and dominates "One Hundred Fires" with a simple r&b sound. Expect the unexpected as this sanctuary of Old New Orleans expands its identity without abandoning its calling.

—John McDonough

So It Is: So It Is; Santiago; Innocence; La Malanga; Convergence; One Hundred Fires; Mad. (34:03)

Personnel: Ben Jaffe, bass, tuba; Ronell Johnson, trombone; Clint Maedgen, tenor saxophone; Charlie Gabriel, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Kyle Roussel, keyboards; Walter Harris, drums; Brandon Lewis (3–6), Stephen Lands (1, 2, 7), trumpet.

Ordering info: legacyrecordings.com



Nicole Mitchell *Mandorla Awakening II: Emerging Worlds*

FPE

★★★★★

For this new incarnation of her Black Earth Ensemble, flutist Nicole Mitchell composed a more-or-less continuous suite as an allegorical work of speculative fiction, based on an integrative Afrofuturist ideal world in which the apparently incompatible concepts of utopia and dystopia are no longer held in opposition. Mitchell imbues the music with a full narrative, including characters and an intergalactic setting, but these elements guide the sounds rather than dramatize it operationally. Even when Avery R. Young sings, the lyrics are evocative, political and symbolic—not plot-driven.

The music directly integrates seeming oppositions, seamlessly pulling together improvised and composed passages, Mitchell's writing alternating between subtle architectural instructions and direct thematic statements. As the program unfolds, the diffuse quality of early tracks gives way to more ostinati, even funky sections like "Listening Embrace," with Tomeka Reid's wicked cello line. The instrumentation itself speaks of opposites united. Flute meets *shakuhachi*. Electric guitar meets *shamisen*. Drum kit meets *taiko*. On "Dance Of Many Hands," the latter meeting of percussionists recalls late-'50s Sun Ra, when he was experimenting with multiple drummers. Mitchell's writing certainly nods at Ra here, especially his twinned flute works, but Mitchell's sphere also includes writers like Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany, and the work feels much more exploratory, creative and transcultural than jazz-derived. —John Corbett

Mandorla Awakening II: Emerging Worlds: Egocentric War; Sub-Mission; The Chalice; Dance Of Many Hands; Listening Embrace; Forestwall Timewalk; Staircase Struggle; Shiny Divider; Mandorla Island; TimeWrap. (74:19)

Personnel: Nicole Mitchell, flute, electronics; Avery R. Young, vocals; Kojiro Umezaki, shakuhachi; Renée Baker, violin; Tomeka Reid, cello, banjo; Alex Wing, electric guitar, oud; Tatsuo Aoki, bass, shamisen, taiko; Jovia Armstrong, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: fperecs.com

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NEW FOR 2017

	Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
Jimmy Greene <i>Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2</i>		★★★	★★★½	★★★	★★★★
Tomasz Stańko NY Quartet <i>December Avenue</i>		★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★½
Preservation Hall Jazz Band <i>So It Is</i>		★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
Nicole Mitchell <i>Mandorla Awakening II</i>		★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Jimmy Greene, *Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2*

New York mainstreamer Greene divides himself here between his light, coolish tenor, a slightly more sharp-edged soprano and two smartly credentialed combos. Despite a couple of song texts, the backstory is never explicit, as it was on volume 1. Instead, the music is full of bright Brazilian and Cuban rhythms that keep the spirit crisp and uplifting. —John McDonough

Enjoyable mixed program, ambitious writing and great playing. This album stakes out a sweet spot between sentimental and scorching, acoustic and mildly electric. —John Corbett

The two vocal tracks become a bit of a distraction when mixed in with the deft instrumental pieces. The heft of the latter swamps the sentiment of the former, and throws things off balance. But each element has its impressive side. —Jim Macnie

Tomasz Stańko New York Quartet, *December Avenue*

December Avenue sums up the ECM aesthetic—the slower the notes, the more profound their value. But Stańko's obedience renders his accessible and lyrical themes so emotionally immobile they are somewhat consumed in their own inertia. —John McDonough

The Polish trumpeter is by now a heroic figure, a survivor who's moved through many transitions and lived to play about it. He sounds wonderful, robust reverb as suits him. Virelles is a marvel—acute and intelligent at every turn. —John Corbett

Stańko is a giant, but this pristinely played sequence of evanescent, understated sound clouds feels passionless, save for the gorgeous "Ballad For Bruno Schulz," dedicated to a Polish writer whose novel *The Street of Crocodiles* Stańko mines for another song title. —Paul de Barros

Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *So It Is*

Not your grampa's PHJB. Updated to a contemporary feel, barely a trad band at all, veering into the jam-friendly terrain of Medeski Martin & Wood. First-rate party music. —John Corbett

I'm loving the way these performances leap out at you. Even those that bide their time have an inherent aggression. Did I mention the broader scope, sound-wise? Helpful. —Jim Macnie

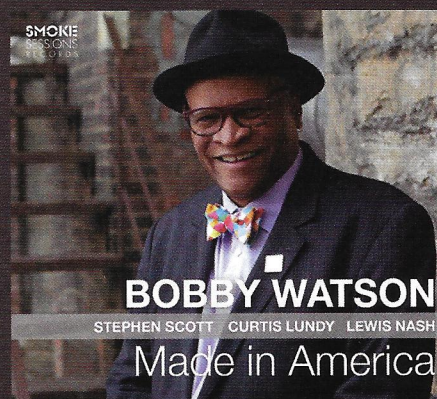
If you like your New Orleans music with a street beat, Cuban swagger and tradition catapulted into the present, this fun, triple "Hurricane" of original music will satisfy your thirst for a funky foray into the French Quarter. —Paul de Barros

Nicole Mitchell, *Mandorla Awakening II*

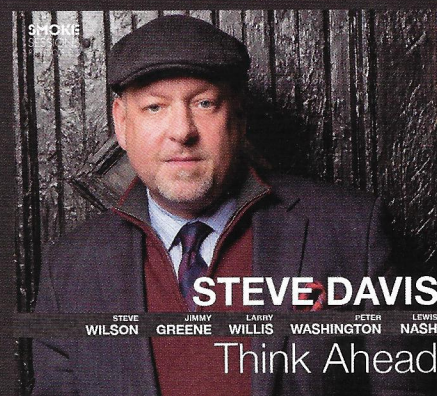
On its face, a disagreeable, often frenzied procession of shrieking turbulence. Layers of clattering percussion and clashing electronics camouflage the more gentle impressionistic uncertainty. Risky listening strictly for the open-minded. You know who you are. —John McDonough

The flutist has long been woke, so this Afrofuturist call-to-arms has both feet on the ground regardless of how high it flits through the cosmos. Abstraction and pulse and politics equals a #resistance epic. —Jim Macnie

Creating music at once this free and organically developed is no mean feat. Mitchell has surpassed herself, integrating her celestial flute with an inspirational, post-Sun-Ra avant-world ensemble both utopian and clear-eyed. Great sounds, great messages. —Paul de Barros



BOBBY WATSON alto saxophone
STEPHEN SCOTT piano
CURTIS LUNDY bass
LEWIS NASH drums



STEVE DAVIS trombone
STEVE WILSON saxophones & flute
JIMMY GREENE tenor saxophone
LARRY WILLIS piano
PETER WASHINGTON bass
LEWIS NASH drums

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